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ABSTRACT

This report presents a guide to involving parents, families, and the community in education. It explains that student achievement increases, schools improve, and parent and community involvement thrives when: (1) parents, families, and community members play an integral role in helping students learn at all grade levels; (2) communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful; (3) sound parenting practices are promoted and supported; (4) parents, families, and community members are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought; (5) parents and community members contribute to school planning and decision making; (6) community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families; and (7) personnel training (preservice and inservice) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement. (SM)

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"We help children learn."
Department of Education

The Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Guide

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This publication has been produced to assist schools, parents, organizations, and others in the community in the development of educational partnerships.

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Parent, Family, and Community Involvement Standards for Massachusetts Public Schools

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Student achievement increases, schools improve, and parent and community involvement thrives when:

Student Learning	Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.
Communication	Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.
Responsibility	Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.
Volunteering	Parents, families and community members are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.
School Decision-Making and Advocacy	Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision making.
Community Collaboration	Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.
Educator/Staff Development	Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Throughout the document, the word "parent" refers to: custodial and non-custodial biological, step, adoptive, and foster mothers and fathers; grandparents; relatives; and other adults who have a significant role in raising and caring for a child.

Student Learning

Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.

Rationale

I	Student learning increases when families and the community work as educational partners at home and in the schools and community. At all grade levels, such involvement provides educators and administrators with a valuable team for supporting student success. Students, parents, and schools benefit when this involvement continues through high school.
II	As the "big picture" team members in a child's education, families are able to nurture and guide children's learning 365 days a year -- far beyond the twelve 180-day years spent in school.
III	Most parents want to assist their children in learning, but many are not sure what assistance is most helpful or appropriate. Whether working together on a computer, displaying student work at home, or helping to develop study habits, parents' purposeful actions communicate to their children that education is important.

Successful programs:

Provide guidance to families in assisting student learning at home, school, and in the community, and ...

a. Inform parents of the curricular goals for students in each subject, at each grade level, suggesting ways to complement and support the curricula outside of school. Advise parents about how they can help students meet individual expectations, find help and support, prepare for standard assessments, and develop skills and habits that promote success and life-long learning.

b. Involve parents in setting student goals, deciding placements and course selections, and planning for post-secondary education and careers.

c. Educate parents about differences in how children learn, particularly with regard to studying, motivation, test preparation, and other factors that impact learning. Offer workshops, printed information, and training as needed.

d. Educate parents about differences in the types and levels of involvement from grades pre-K to 12 and beyond. Help staff understand that parent involvement has developmental stages, too.

Student Learning

Parents, families, and community members play an integral role in assisting student learning at all grade levels.

e. Distribute homework expectations and policies, including guidelines for how families can best facilitate the completion of homework and give feedback to teachers.

f. Assign homework that asks students and their families to interact, thereby increasing parents' awareness of what their children are learning in class.

g. Equip staff with strategies for engaging parents as partners in their children's education. Analyze data to identify successful strategies for reaching various parent populations.

Successful programs also encourage families to ...

a. Sustain a collaborative relationship with their children's teachers in order to stay informed about learning expectations and student progress.

b. Reinforce successful learning strategies, acceptable school behavior, time management, organization skills, and planning. Limit television viewing and computer use.

c. Make reading routine in the home. Share stories\songs with younger children; set reading expectations for older students. Model good reading habits. Make a variety of age\grade appropriate reading materials available at home.

d. Discuss and display student work regularly. Think beyond the refrigerator! (i.e., workplace displays, framed art)

e. Establish a regular time and appropriate space for children to do homework. Offer assistance as outlined by teachers.

f. Convey the benefits of planning, goal setting, and rising to challenge. Celebrate effort as well as achievement.

g. Engage together in educational activities at home, school, and in the community. Be role models for promoting life-long learning and by demonstrating such behaviors as price comparison-shopping, daily reading, and problem solving.

Communication

Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.

Rationale

I	Communication is the foundation of a solid partnership. When homes and schools communicate effectively: (1) positive relationships develop; (2) problems are more easily solved; and (3) student achievement increases.
II	Effective home-school communication is a two-way exchange of information where ideas and perceptions are shared. Quality home-school partnerships require: (1) give-and-take conversation; (2) goal setting for the future; and (3) regular and timely follow-up.

Successful programs:

❖ *Foster a school climate that demonstrates to parents that their involvement is welcomed and valued, and....*

a. Invite families to visit and participate through: prominent welcome signs, friendly staff (particularly in the front office), orientations/open houses, school directories and maps, guest books, displays, and print materials.

b. Encourage regular two-way communication between parents and school staff by using a variety of tools such as web sites, e-mail, bulletin boards, newsletters, and home visits.

c. Provide progress reports as well as report cards to parents. Offer follow up conferences as needed and home or community visitation programs for hard to reach parents.

d. Provide clear information to parents (as well as students) about course selections and expectations, extra-curricular activities, student services, testing schedules, discipline codes, and school policies.

e. Celebrate student work in all disciplines through various school displays and programs.

Communication

Communication between home and school is consistent, two-way, and meaningful.

Successful programs also...

f. Post the district and school improvement plan and meeting minutes and agendas (i.e., school committee, school council, and PTA/PTO) via local web-sites, bulletin boards, and newsletters.

g. Facilitate contact between parents and teachers as soon as concerns arise. Encourage contact regarding positive student behavior and achievement, not just problems and weaknesses. Provide resources that enable teachers and other school personnel, as appropriate, to communicate with families (e.g., clerical/printing assistance, easy telephone access).

h. Assure that student work is available for family review and comment in a timely manner.

i. Conduct conferences with parents at least twice a year. Offer scheduling options and accommodations such as translation services, childcare, and transportation, if necessary.

j. Encourage communication and collaboration between various committees such as school councils, PTA/PTO's, and leadership teams. Actively seek input from parents and parent groups on school issues and planning. If a formal parent group does not exist organize one.

k. Translate communications to ensure that non-English speaking parents are fully informed.

l. Provide as much as possible handicap accessibility into buildings and parking areas.

m. Provide opportunities for parents to communicate with school administrators about issues of concern. Provide forums on the curriculum and how parents can support their children's learning at home. (Informal sessions such as coffees in parents' homes or community centers might be held by district and school personnel.)

n. Provide adults and students with opportunities to learn together (e.g., family math, science, and technology events).

o. Organize activities (in and out of school) where parents, staff, and community members can get to know one another.

Responsibility

Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.

Rationale

I	Because a school is student-centered it is an ideal venue for promoting and supporting good parenting practices. Research shows that families exercise authority over key factors that influence educational achievement such as: student attendance, obtaining educational materials for the home, television viewing and/or computer use, monitoring homework completion, using community resources, and providing a healthy and safe home environment.
II	A parent is a child's first teacher, preparing and supporting him/her to be a successful learner. From providing a nurturing home environment to setting appropriate expectations and limits, successful parenting strategies can significantly raise educational performance.
III	Students benefit when schools communicate a respect for a families involvement in education and support the parenting skills required to promote success. This value can be communicated in print materials and displays, thoughtful scheduling, and in what school staff members do and say.

Successful programs:

❖ *View family involvement and the skills associated with supporting student achievement as essential for success. They communicate expectations to parents, and ...*

a. Educate parents about the many ways they can be involved from setting expectations to participation in school events. Schools and the community work to remove obstacles to involvement.

b. Ensure that parents and teachers work together to communicate expectations to students such as regular attendance and homework completion.

Responsibility

Sound parenting practices are promoted and supported.

Successful programs also:

c. Link parents to community and government resources that provide support services to families (e.g. youth organizations, counseling agencies, nutrition programs). Provide parents with opportunities to network and support each other's parenting skills.

d. Establish an easily accessible parent/family resource center (in the school or community) where parents can find information on parenting, child-development, and support services.

e. Partner with community organizations to provide workshops for families. Develop training programs, support groups, and other learning experiences based on input from family surveys.

f. Establish parent-involvement policies and practices that acknowledge traditional and non-traditional families (e.g., changing the salutation on home communications from "Dear Parents" to "Dear Families and Friends").

g. Encourage collaboration between school personnel and parents to find ways to prevent violence, peer ridicule, and other anti-social behavior from occurring in the schools. Work together to ensure that schools are safe environments for student learning and development.

h. Encourage parents to make educational materials such as dictionaries, thesauruses, and calculators available in the home. Partner with the community to acquire materials for families who cannot afford such items.

Volunteering

Parents, families, and community members are welcome in the school and their support and assistance are sought.

Rationale

I	When parents and community members volunteer in the schools families and schools benefit considerably. Valuable services, including volunteering and in-kind services, are performed by parents each year in the public schools. When schools capitalize on volunteers' expertise and skills they are better able to meet the needs of their students.
II	Volunteers express greater confidence in the schools when they have opportunities to participate regularly and in meaningful ways. They gain valuable insight and satisfaction from their experiences and contributions. Also, by participating in school programs, activities, and events volunteers model attitudes and behaviors about education, communicating a concern about children and their schools.
III	For many adults, it is not possible to volunteer during regular school hours. Before or after school programs, and home and community based activities provide additional opportunities for parents and others to show their support and be involved. Adult participation in learning activities communicates a value for education to students.

Successful programs:

❖ *Utilize volunteers in meaningful ways to reach their goals, and ...*

a. Survey parents and community members to identify individuals who are willing to volunteer in the school system. Include questions about volunteers' interests, skills, and availability. Develop a volunteer database and distribute to school personnel and organizations for easy access.

b. Develop organized and coordinated programs for volunteer activities that are meaningful and that match individual interests and abilities.

c. Initiate a reasonable and effective process for screening potential volunteers to ensure the safety and security of the school population.

Volunteering

Parents, families, and community members are welcome in the school, and their support and assistance are sought.

Successful Programs also:

d. Ensure that alternative volunteer opportunities are available, either at home or through places of employment, for parents and community members who are unable to contribute at school.

e. Provide volunteers with adequate training in the tasks they will perform as well as in school procedures and protocols.

f. Develop communication networks that link volunteers with the school throughout the school year.

g. Recognize the contributions of volunteers through ceremonies, certificates and other methods of appreciation.

h. Design volunteer opportunities for parents with limited time and resources by adopting creative solutions to address the issues of childcare, transportation, language differences, work schedules, etc.

i. Demonstrate an ongoing appreciation for and recognition of volunteers through public ceremonies, certificates, and acknowledgment in print. (These practices often double as vehicles for recruitment!)

School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision-making.

Rationale

I	Schools realize higher levels of student achievement and public support when parents and community members are involved in decision-making and advocacy.
II	Effective parent and community participation in the decision-making process fosters trust, public confidence, and mutual support.
III	Collaboration with parent and community groups bring additional skills, resources, and points of view to support improvement in areas such as curriculum, school safety, support services, and education reform.
IV	Parents and community members can be important advocates for quality education. As partners, they help build public understanding and support. They can also play an advocacy role in the community and in local government.

Successful programs:

❖ *Provide clear and well-publicized information inviting the public to participate in decision making, and ...*

a. Work in collaboration with PTA/PTO's and other parent and community organizations to implement the school improvement plan and identify and address issues of importance to parents.

b. Include parents and community representatives on decision-making and advisory committees. Provide adequate training in areas such as the local budget, curriculum alignment, and reform initiatives.

c. Maintain parity between parents and professional staff on school councils [according to GL c.71, s.59(c) of the Massachusetts Education Reform Law of 1993]. Ensure there is a co-chair, and encourage a parent to serve in this position.

School Decision-Making and Advocacy

Parents and community members contribute in school planning and decision-making.

Successful programs also:

d. Provide parents and community members with important information regarding school policies, practices, and student performance data.

e. Ensure that parent and community members have an opportunity for input when planning for school improvement.

f. Treat parent and community concerns with respect. Actively work to demonstrate a genuine interest in seeking resolutions.

g. Educate parents and the community about the roles and responsibilities of school committees, superintendents, principals, and school councils. Encourage parents and the community to act responsibly as advocates for and supporters of quality education for all students.

h. Promote participation at the school, district, state, and national levels to address issues that impact student achievement.

i. Provide training to participants on committees to help them work as effective partners. This training may involve running effective meetings, resolving differences, defining school jargon and procedures, making discussions accessible to bilingual parents and others with limited involvement in day-to-day operations, and ways to actively invite parents to comment on discussions and decisions.

Community Collaboration

Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.

Rationale

I	Collaboration cultivates relationships with individuals and organizations that can support and improve the educational experiences of students, teachers, and parents.
II	Students learn about the realities of the workplace and social responsibility as a result of successful community and workplace partnerships.
III	Community partnerships offer resources that support students and families so that they can focus on learning.
IV	Communities become stronger when schools, businesses, organizations, and individuals become more adept at working together.

Successful programs:

❖ *Provide parents with access to community resources that support the family and student success, and ...*

a. Distribute information regarding community services for families such as after school programs, tutoring services, health care, and cultural and recreational events.

b. Develop partnerships that encourage local businesses and service providers to help prepare students for the world of work and civic responsibility.

c. Encourage policies and practices that promote and support individuals from the community to participate in public education.

Community Collaboration

Community resources are sought to strengthen schools, communities, and families.

Successful programs also:

d. Collaborate with community agencies to provide family support services and adult learning opportunities.

e. Ensure that teachers and school staff have printed information about local adult basic education programs and community resources and services so that they may share this information with families.

f. Work with families and the community to provide safe and valuable after-school/summer experiences for students at all grade levels.

g. Develop formal partnerships with community organizations to receive referrals and/or to provide services.

h. Expand the school advisory council to include community organizations to integrate school planning with local community planning and resources development efforts.

Educator/Staff Development

Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Rationale

I	Teachers report that parent involvement is a top priority and challenge. When schools provide training for all their staff, including administrators, teachers, and support personnel in parent outreach and engagement, educators work together to employ new ways of involving families in supporting student success.
II	Research studies confirm the strong correlation between effective parent involvement and increased student achievement. When teachers, guidance counselors, and others share best practices in involving parents and other caring adults, students, families, and schools benefit.

Successful programs:

Train educators (pre-service and in-service) to work with parents and other caring adults as educational partners, and....

a. Provide educators with research findings and information on the benefits and modes of family and community involvement, pre-K to 12 and beyond. Include ample opportunity for educators to share best practices and challenges. Be sure to include best practice regarding mentorship and tutoring programs, as well.

b. Help educators develop the skills, sensitivity, and insight necessary to work effectively with parents representing a variety of family structures and cultural backgrounds.

c. Train school personnel in creating an inviting school environment that welcomes all parents and community partners.

d. Provide training on effective parent outreach and engagement strategies, including the importance of regular two-way communication between the school and home.

Educator/Staff Development

Personnel training (pre-service and in-service) includes courses and workshops on parent, family, and community involvement.

Successful programs also:

e. Promote family literacy programs that focus on the family unit, rather than its individual members, as the focus of learning.

f. Offer training to develop strategies to overcome barriers that may prevent parent participation in the schools (i.e. transportation, childcare, low literacy levels, school climate). Increase school personnel's understanding of how differences in parents' literacy levels and cultural backgrounds may impact involvement and student learning.

g. Provide instruction on communication skills, and how to create respectful, positive, and productive parent-teacher conferences.

g. Provide strategies for communicating with parents about their roles in helping their children succeed in school.

h. Present models showing successful school and parent/community partnerships, including methods for building such partnerships. Emphasize effective utilization of volunteer services.

i. Educate staff about community resources and programs (e.g., adult literacy programs, human service agencies, museums, and libraries) and how to connect families with such resources.

j. Promote community partnerships through programs such as intergenerational education, adult mentoring, community service learning, and school-to-career. Involve community agencies in the development of family workshops.

k. Foster an appreciation for involving all stakeholders in school governance and advocacy. Bring staff, parents, and community members together for training in leadership, collaboration, advocacy, and shared decision-making.